

# philippine studies

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## **Johnston: Witnesses to God, and Monro: The Old Testament and Our Times**

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Accustomed ways of selecting leaders are usually modified as they are channeled into prescribed procedures. This latter variable, like the ideology on which it is based, cannot be taken for granted in any thorough treatment of the dynamics of politics.

These omissions do not, however, detract from the over-all merit of the research. Filipino students in particular will profit greatly from a reading of Mrs. Hollnsteiner's study for its substantive, empirical and theoretical content as well as for the methodology employed. It is a most heartening local example of what empirical research by a perceptive student of social science can do to illumine the basic local processes of a society. In a country so lacking in reliable social studies it is an encouraging and refreshing piece of research. Using the author's hypotheses, fruitful follow-up studies in other communities can be made.

This sociological study was carried out under a research grant provided by the University of the Philippines Community Development Research Council. It is one of several studies on Philippine rural society and community development work that have been made possible by funds from the Presidential Assistant on Community Development administered by the CDRC. In its original form the Hollnsteiner study was submitted in 1960 as a thesis for the M.A. degree at the University of the Philippines.

JOSE V. ABUEVA

## THE BIBLE COMES ALIVE

**WITNESSES TO GOD.** By Leonard Johnston. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960. 174 pp. \$3.50.

**THE OLD TESTAMENT AND OUR TIMES.** By Margaret T. Monro. London: Longmans, 1960. 104 pp. 15 shillings.

In the steady stream of books flowing from the pens of authors professionally engaged in or thoroughly conversant with the modern Biblical renaissance two recent volumes from England stand out remarkable for their differences as well as for their similarities. **WITNESSES** has for author a priest and professor of Sacred Scripture, touches upon both Old and New Testaments in chronological order, emphasizes the content of the chapters and books discussed in the light of God's witness to himself through his Word—spoken, active, and Incarnate. It is written in a witty and chatty style, but aims

primarily at enlightenment. *THE OLD TESTAMENT AND OUR TIMES*, which can boast of a famous lady convert and writer as its author, describes Old Testament religious phenomena by working backwards, starting with the last books about Wisdom first and ending with Creation in Genesis. It is serious in tone, pointing out perennial human problems as they were met in the Old Testament and suggesting in the topics *For Discussion* how the Old Testament approach can be of value to men of our times. These topics and the Biblical sections *For Reading* after each of the ten chapters indicate the book's practical intent. But both books are eminently readable and present the up-to-date Catholic approach to Scripture.

Father Johnston lays the foundation for his essays on the special nature of the Bible as "Salvation History", events selected, arranged, described to bring out a particular religious point of view, that of God's saving power throughout the history of the world and Israel. But the writing of this history is the work of men who used the methods and conventions of their day, relying upon hazardous oral traditions and selecting various, perhaps to us unfamiliar, "literary forms"—a method of interpretation officially sanctioned and offered to exegetes by Pope Pius XII. The clear distinction between religious truths taught by the sacred author and the literary dress in which they are clothed is applied in lively fashion to the accounts of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noe's rainbow, Abraham, Melchisedech. If there should be contradiction in a story, as for instance the Hebrew names given by the first parents to their children (as if Hebrew were the primitive language!) the modern reader ought to recognize the author's awareness of it as well. In the Cain story the author was concerned with the narration as a medium for presenting religious truth: the sinfulness of man and the mystery of God's grace and election. Moses, the Egyptian-reared Hebrew, was a man of tremendous patriotism and sympathy towards his own people, but was of less than heroic proportions. It was God's revelation and power that released the Hebrews from Egypt and constituted Moses the "Maker of Israel". Sketches of the judge Gedeon, King David, the prophets Elias and Isaias, and the scribe Esdras, manifest God's hand in the affairs of his chosen people.

A chapter is devoted to the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness and three to the Evangelists and the two Johns. Father Johnston succinctly and competently explains the formation of the Gospels, from Peter's first preached sermons on the Resurrection and Old Testament fulfillment down to the written records of Our Lord's words and deeds. He highlights the literary form of the Gospel as "Good News", shows the different aspects of Our Lord presented by the individual evangelists, and counsels us to look for the eternal significance behind the selection and arrangement of events in Christ's life. A strictly historical and chronological order belongs to historical bio-

graphy, but the evangelists are giving us a Gospel, not a biography. The last chapter climaxes the testimony to God's power and love in the "Witness, faithful and true", Christ, who is put to death but who lives on in his Mystical Body, the Church. In this small book, Father Johnston gives us a popular and informal, though necessarily incomplete, introduction to the Bible, which could be extremely helpful to teachers of college theology. It might even serve as a textbook.

In keeping to the purpose of this "Short Reading Course", Miss Monro first lists several points to help form the proper historical and psychological mentality requisite for an intelligent reading of the Old Testament, such as God's patient pedagogy, edification in "un-edifying" stories, literary conventions, etc. Beginning with the Wisdom movement, an attempt to apply human understanding to the issues of life, Miss Monro correctly portrays Israel as influenced in these matters by neighboring lands but wholly original in finding the origin of Wisdom in God himself. The movement had first been concerned with showing young men how to live a full, happy life, but came to be principally a system of education for administrative posts. Miss Monro's unique contribution in recognizing Wisdom training for girls as well and especially in interpreting the Canticle as Wisdom betrothal songs sung by bride and groom could provide material for very interesting discussions.

The "Angry Young Men" in exile whom Ezechiel had to instruct on the need of worshipping God on *his* conditions can shed light on the similar plight of souls today who prefer the non-demanding religion of agnosticism or atheism. Social injustice in Israel and the Assyrian disaster threatening Judah find remarkable parallels in the contemporary scene with its ever-present abuses of capitalism and the menace of communism. There are chapters on the economic revolution wrought by iron in the time of David and Solomon, the creation stories of Genesis, and Hebrew ideas on the after life. While the material directly about the Old Testament is thoroughly fresh, accurate and informative, the practical applications to modern problems makes this work especially useful for serious discussion groups and for social justice study.

These two slim volumes on the Bible are far more valuable than their size would indicate. It is to be hoped that they and similar books, like *THE TWO-EDGED SWORD* by John L. McKenzie and *UNLESS SOME MAN SHOW ME* by Alexander Jones, find a wide circulation in the Philippines. They would not merely satisfy the curiosity of those wondering what the new Biblical movement is all about, but would present the Word of God as a practical, vital force in our Catholic thought and life, and help to nourish souls on this bread from heaven which should become our daily bread.